

Penobscot Nation

by ReadWorks



BIRCHBARK WIGWAMS OF PENOBSCOT INDIANS.

Maine has a varied landscape, which includes hills, forests, rivers, streams, mountains, and coastline. The Penobscot Indians, a tribe native to a large portion of what is now the state of Maine, adapted to and used many parts of the land.

For centuries before the state of Maine was created, Penobscot Indians lived mainly in the region now known as the Penobscot River Basin. A river basin is the name for the land around a river and its smaller tributaries; river basins can be very small, or, in the case of the Penobscot River, very large. The Penobscot River Basin accounts for one-third of the state's area!

Rivers are known to be fundamental for civilizations. They provide a resource of utmost importance: water! The Penobscot Indians built their lives around the river and all that it supported. The river was a source of food, for example, as it provided fish for the Penobscot Indians to eat.

Both the main river and its smaller branches provided a means of transportation, and the Penobscot were extremely skilled at making canoes from the bark of birch trees, using branches and roots from ash, spruce, and cedar trees for other parts of the boats.

Besides its rivers, one of Maine's most distinct features has been its tree cover. Today, forestry and logging are important industries in Maine. Trucks stacked high with tree trunks rattle down roads in central Maine all day long, making loud noises and leaving behind the sticky smell of pine. Penobscot Indians used trees to their advantage long before modern loggers, however. In addition to making canoes, the Penobscot Indians built homes from the bark of birch trees. Bigger dwellings were made of larger branches and logs.

Within the forest, Penobscot Indians were able to hunt bears, moose, caribou, beavers, and otters for

pelts (used for a variety of purposes, including warmth-it gets cold during Maine winters!) and food. They also gathered much of their food, collecting nuts, berries, and birds' eggs to augment their diet.

The Penobscot people crafted their own tools, including arrowheads, baskets, boats, and snowshoes. Today, Penobscot Indians have access to the same modern amenities that all Americans do, but many still make their own tools. This is in part because craftspeople can make money selling their work, but also for cultural reasons.

Penobscot Indians, like American Indians all over the United States, suffered a great deal when European settlers arrived. Disease killed thousands of American Indians, and settlers stole much of their land. Now, many American Indians live on reservations dedicated specifically to their population. Many Penobscot Indians today live near the land of their ancestors, in Maine.

Early People in the Central American Land Bridge

by James Folta



People have been living in Central and South America for many, many years now. How did ancient people live in this area thousands of years ago? Archaeologists studying the area of the Central American land bridge have been working to answer this question.

What is the Central American land bridge? It is the land that is now the countries of Costa Rica and Panama. Like a modern bridge over a river, this land bridge was used by animals and people to travel back and forth. This Central American land bridge connects the northern land that is now Nicaragua, Mexico, and so on to the southern land that is now Colombia, Brazil, and other South American countries.

People who were already living in North America traveled down and across this land bridge. Scientists think they traveled there around 11,000 BC. They probably were following large animals that they hunted and ate. These people would have traveled on foot, following the herds of animals. They had no permanent houses. They would pack up their things and bring them along as they hunted. Their homes were like tents and were very easy to take down and put up. Archaeologists can tell these people traveled via the land bridge because they have found similar arrowheads and tools in both the land bridge and in areas further north and south.

These tools are the main record of people's movement and settlement. Ancient people at this time made their tools, by hand, out of stone. Later, they used obsidian, which is a dark glass formed in volcanoes. They made small hand axes, arrowheads and spearheads by knapping. Knapping is when you hit one stone with another to break off little pieces. Slowly, you can shape the stone however you want. When certain stones (like obsidian or flint) break, they leave very sharp edges, which can be used to cut.

Archaeologists don't find evidence of these tools very often. When so much time passes, natural things like rain, dirt and trees destroy and bury them. Scientists also think the oceans were lower back then. This means there once was more land that is now underwater. Probably there is more evidence of people living in the area under the sea off the coasts of Costa Rica and Panama.

It is hard to tell when people stopped traveling along the land bridge and began living there. One clue is when people began farming. On the land bridge, this was around 9,000 and 7,000 BC. In Panama, scientists have found evidence that people were growing bottle gourds, squash, and a few other things around that time. These would be in small gardens, not big farms. People weren't eating just the plants they grew at this time. They would gather fruits and nuts from the forest, hunt deer, fish for crabs and fish, and eat from their gardens.

Archaeologists now think that some forests were actually farms too, which makes it harder to determine when hunting and gathering stopped. Places we once thought were wild were perhaps maintained by ancient people. This would be like an apple orchard. It looks like a forest, but has actually been planted and taken care of by humans-you wouldn't know it was a farm for apples unless you looked more closely. The same thing probably happened on the Central American land bridge and elsewhere.

Slowly, people built more permanent houses on the land bridge. The first small village archaeologists have found is in Costa Rica, in a place called Tronadora Vieja. There are round pole and thatch houses, which are simple huts made out of long tree branches covered in leaves and grasses. These houses date to 3,800 BC and were destroyed when a nearby volcano exploded and buried them in ash. Scientists also found the earliest maize kernels on the land bridge, as well as metates. Metates are small stone tables used to grind maize into powder. This was used in cooking and baking, like flour. Nearby at Laguna Zoncho, archaeologists found a bigger village, with more houses and farms. People started living here after Tronadora Vieja, around 3,240 BC.

People were still hunting and gathering at this time, though. Why did some people settle down to farm and some people continue moving around? There are lots of ideas, but on the land bridge, archaeologists think it had to do with the amount of rain and water in the area. Places that had less water made it harder for the forests to remain full of fruits and animals. So in these dry areas, people started to farm more, build houses and stay put. So some groups kept hunting and gathering while others were starting to build and farm.

Archaeologists are still studying this part of the world. Hopefully in the years to come, we can find out more about how ancient people lived on the Central American land bridge.

Vocabulary

evidence

noun

definition: something that gives proof or a reason to believe.

Scientists have not yet found evidence of life on Mars.

Spanish: evidencia

permanent

adjective

definition: lasting or meant to last for a very long time; everlasting.

The new porch is a nice, permanent addition to the house.

Spanish: permanente

archaeologist

noun

definition: An archaeologist is a scientist who works in the field of archaeology. Archaeology is the study of human life a very long time ago.

The archaeologists were excited about finding the spot where an ancient village was. They were digging and found some walls of a building.

Spanish: arqueólogo

1. Before you start reading...

Here are the vocabulary words that will be in this reading. Let's see how well you already know them.

Check the box that shows how well you know each word. It's ok if you don't know them yet (this is not graded)!

	Don't know it	Have heard of it but not sure of its meaning	Know something about its meaning	Know it well
adapt				
evidence				
permanent				

2. Word Matcher

Every word has other words that have similar meanings or even the exact same meaning (these are called synonyms!). Draw a line from each similar word or synonym to the vocabulary word that it matches!

conform

alter

naturalize

proof

testimony

adapt

evidence

permanent

confirmation

perpetual

persistent

indefinite

3. After reading and exploring the words through some activities...

Do you know these words better? Check the box that shows how well you know each word. It's ok if you don't know them yet (this is not graded)!

	Don't know it	Have heard of it but not sure of its meaning	Know something about its meaning	Know it well
adapt				
evidence				
permanent				

Name: _____ Date: _____

Use the article "Penobscot Nation" to answer questions 1 to 2.

1. What important resource do rivers provide to civilizations?
2. Name two things that the Penobscot River provided to the Indians who lived by it.

Use the article "Early People in the Central American Land Bridge" to answer questions 3 to 4.

3. Why do archeologists think that some people settled down to farm on the Central American land bridge?
4. Explain why people might be more likely to farm in a place that has LESS water. Support your answer with evidence from the article.

Use the articles "Early People in the Central American Land Bridge" and "Penobscot Nation" to answer questions 5 to 6.

5. Compare the importance of water to the settlement of the Penobscot River Basin with the importance of water to the settlement of the Central American land bridge.
6. If the Penobscot River Basin had been small instead of large, would the lives of the Penobscot Indians have been different? Support your answer with evidence from both texts.